ALBERTA CROP REPORT
Surveyed May 3, 2011

Provincial

Agricultural operations are off to a slow start in all regions of the province this year. Abundant snow fall this past winter, cool temperatures in March and April and several precipitation events this spring have resulted in a slow snow melt and delayed soil dry down and warming. Excessive moisture is a problem in most regions with 17% of the province rating surface soil moisture as excessive. Currently, less than 0.10% of the province (less than 18,000 acres) has been seeded as compared to the historical 5 year average of 15%.

Surface soil moisture is very good with over 77% of the province rated as good/excellent. This should provide crops with the opportunity for an excellent start once producers can access their fields and commence seeding operations. Surface moisture in the top 6 inches is rated 0.3% poor/ 5.5% fair/ 26.7% good/ 50.4% excellent/ 17.1% excessive.

Hay and pasture growth has been slow due to the cool spring conditions. With good available moisture, forage crops should flourish under warmer temperatures. Forage crops are rated 18% poor/ 28% fair/ 48% good/ 6% excellent.

Region One: South (Strathmore, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Foremost)

Little seeding has been achieved to date. Fields have been slow to dry down and several snow/rainfall events have lengthened the delays. Traditionally, seeding across much of southern Alberta begins in the April 15 – 20th period. Currently, seeding progress is estimated at 0.3% seeded. This is considerably behind the difficult year of 2010 when 8% was seeded. The 5 year average is 29% completed with the 10 year average of 38% seeded by this time.

Excessive surface soil moisture is a major problem in all areas of the region with 35% of the region affected. Otherwise, surface soil moisture is very good with the remaining 65% of acres rated good or excellent which should benefit emergence and early growth. Subsoil moisture is also rated very high which bodes well for crop development in the remainder of the growing season. Forage crop conditions are rated 3% poor/ 29% fair/ 53% good/ 15% excellent and should improve with warmer weather.

Region Two: Central (Rimbey, Airdrie, Coronation, Oyen)

Virtually no seeding has occurred to date due to the cold, wet conditions. Field work is getting underway in the eastern portion of the region but another 5 – 7 days will be required before operations will be general in the central and western areas. Traditionally, seeding starts in very late April/early May across the region. The 5 year seeded average for early May is 11% with the 10 year average at 17% seeded.

10% of the region is rating surface moisture as excessive, principally in the central area. Surface soil moisture is rated 0% poor/ 2% fair/ 22% good/ 66% excellent/ 10% excessive. Subsoil moisture ratings are higher providing prospects for a good crop year. Hay and pasture ratings are being affected by the cool start to the season with 22% rated poor/ 15% fair/ 53% good/ 9% excellent.

Region Three: North East (Smoky Lake, Vermilion, Camrose, Provost)

Virtually no seeding has occurred. Field operations are beginning in the extreme south eastern portion of the region but the cool spring temperatures have slowed soil dry down across the remainder of the region. Traditionally, this region does not start seeding until May 5 – 7 with the exception of the earlier southeast portion. The 5 year average for the region is 5% seeded with the 10 year average of 7% seeded by this time.

Excessive surface soil moisture is generally not an issue in this region with the exception of the area south and east of Edmonton which is reporting high excessive moisture levels of 20 – 40%. For the region, surface moisture is rated 2% poor/ 24% fair/ 39% good/ 29% excellent/ 6% excessive. Subsoil moisture levels are rated very similarly to those of surface moisture.

Hay and pasture ratings are being affected by the slow, cool start with 26% rated poor/ 26% fair/ 44% good/ 4% excellent.

Region Four: North West (Barrhead, Edmonton, Leduc, Drayton Valley, Athabasca)

Virtually no seeding has occurred to date due to the slow dry down and the occurrence of rain showers in many areas. Traditionally, this region does not start seeding until May 1 – 5th. The 5 year average is 6% seeded with the 10 year average of 7% by this time of the season.

Excessive surface moisture is small at 2% of the region. Surface moisture is rated 0% poor/ 2% fair/ 58% good/ 38% excellent/ 2% excessive. The region was very dry in 2010 but benefited from timely rains to produce a near average crop. As a result, subsoil moisture ratings are lower than average and the area will likely be very dependent upon in season precipitation to bring off a good crop in 2011. Subsoil moisture is rated 0% poor/ 54% fair/ 18% good/ 28% excellent.

Hay and pasture ratings are being affected by the residual effects of the dry conditions in 2010 and the cool spring in 2011. Forage crops are rated 23% poor/ 52% fair/ 25% good/ 0% excellent.

Region Five: Peace River (Fairview, Falher, Grande Prairie, Valleyview)

No seeding is being reported and is not expected to start for another 5 – 10 days due to the slow snow melt. Traditionally, the region is extremely variable from year to year for seeding progress. In 2006, 65% of the region was seeded by May 11, but in 2007, 2008 & 2009 less than 1% had been seeded for that same time period. The 5 & 10 year averages are 15% seeded by early May.

Excessive surface moisture is a very significant issue in the south and east central areas of the region with ratings of 60 – 70% excessive. Overall, 29% of the region is rated excessive. Surface moisture is rated 0% poor/ 0% fair/ 4% good/ 67% excellent/ 29% excessive. Subsoil moisture is showing good recharge after the droughty conditions in southern and central regions in 2010 with ratings of 0% poor/ 3% fair/ 31% good/ 66% excellent.

Hay and pasture ratings are being reported better than expected for early in the season at 13% poor/ 21% fair/ 66% good/ 0% excellent.

Prepared by: James Wright
Agriculture Financial Services Corporation
Lacombe, Alberta